

THE HONORABLE EDWARD P. DJEREJIAN,
CHAIRMAN, ADVISORY GROUP ON PUBLIC DIPLOMACY FOR THE
ARAB AND MUSLIM WORLD,
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON THE DEPARTMENTS OF
COMMERCE, JUSTICE AND STATE, THE JUDICIARY AND RELATED AGENCIES

February 4, 2004

Mr. Chairman:

It is a honor for me to appear before this Subcommittee and I wish to commend Chairman Frank Wolf and the Subcommittee for taking the initiative to request the Administration to establish the Advisory Group on Public Diplomacy for the Arab and Muslim World which Secretary of State Colin Powell asked me to chair.

I would like to summarize some of the major findings in our Advisory Group's Report and look forward to your questions and comments. Allow me to state from the outset that the issue we are addressing is one of the most important challenges that the United States faces--the struggle for ideas in the Post Cold War era.

The Challenge

The United States today lacks the capabilities in public diplomacy to meet the national security threat emanating from political instability, economic deprivation, and extremism, especially in the Arab and Muslim world. Public diplomacy is the promotion of the national interest by listening, understanding, and then informing, engaging, and influencing people around the world. Public diplomacy helped win the Cold War, and it has the potential to help win the war on terror and the struggle for ideas we now face.

A year ago, in the National Security Strategy of the United States, President George W. Bush recognized the importance of adapting public diplomacy to meet the post-September 11 challenge: "Just as our diplomatic institutions must adapt so that we can reach out to others, we also need a different and more comprehensive approach to public information efforts that can help people around the world learn about and understand America. The war on terrorism is not a clash of civilizations. It does, however, reveal the clash inside a civilization, a battle for the future of the Muslim world. This is a struggle of ideas and this is an area where America must excel."

But a process of unilateral disarmament in the weapons of advocacy over the last decade has contributed to widespread negative attitudes and even hostility toward the United States and left us vulnerable to lethal threats to our interests and our safety.

The bottom has indeed fallen out of support for the United States. In Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world, only 15 percent view the United States favorably,

compared with 61 percent in early 2002. In Saudi Arabia, according to a Gallup poll, only 7 percent had a "very favorable" view of the U.S. while 49 percent had a "very unfavorable" view. In Turkey, a secular Muslim, non-Arab democracy that is a stalwart member of NATO and a longtime supporter of America, favorable opinion toward the U.S. dropped from 52 percent three years ago to 15 percent in the spring of 2003, according to the Pew Research Center. The problem is not limited to the Arab and Muslim world. In Spain, an ally in the war in Iraq, 3 percent had a "very favorable" view of the United States while 39 percent had a "very unfavorable" view.

America's position as, by far, the world's preeminent power may well contribute to the animosity, but it is not a satisfying explanation. The United States enjoyed the same level of relative power after World War II, for example, but was widely admired throughout the world. Arab and Muslim nations are a primary source of anger toward the United States, although such negative attitudes are paralleled in Europe and elsewhere.

Since September 11, 2001, the stakes have been raised. Attitudes toward the United States were important in the past, but now they have become a central national security concern. Although the objective of foreign policy is to promote our national interests and not, specifically, to inspire affection, hostility toward the United States makes achieving our policy goals far more difficult. The Defense Science Board reported nearly two years ago that effective "information dissemination capabilities are powerful assets vital to national security. They can create diplomatic opportunities, lessen tensions that might lead to war, contain conflicts, and address nontraditional threats to America's interests." Achieving our interests is far easier if we do not have to buck a tide of anti-Americanism in addition to considered policy opposition.

Today's public diplomacy has proven inadequate to the task. The creation of the United States Information Agency (USIA) 50 years ago, at the height of the Cold War, was a recognition that traditional state-to-state diplomacy alone could not achieve U.S. interests in a world of fast communications and sophisticated propaganda. Government is only one player among many trying to influence the opinions of people in other countries, and state-to-state diplomacy alone will not improve negative attitudes of citizens. Part of this inadequacy is the result of a lack of proper resources, both human and financial, but much of it is the result of insufficient strategic coordination at the top and a management structure that lacks flexibility and limits accountability.

Overall, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, our efforts at public diplomacy, especially in the Arab and Muslim world, have proven severely wanting. But with greater focus, commitment, and changes in management structure and resources, real progress can be made. What is needed is a consistent, strategic, well-managed, and properly funded approach to public diplomacy, one that credibly reflects U.S. values, promotes the positive thrust of U.S. policies, and takes seriously the needs and aspirations of the overwhelming majority of Arabs and Muslims for peace, prosperity, and social justice.

The Role of Policy and the Role of Communication

Before I outline the Advisory Group's recommendations, however, we must make an effort to separate questions of policy from questions of communicating that policy. Surveys show clearly that specific American policies profoundly affect attitudes toward the United States. That stands to reason. For example, large majorities in the Arab and Muslim world view U.S. policy through the prism of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Arabs and Muslims overwhelmingly opposed the post-9/11 U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan, as well as the use of force against Iraq, and the U.S. war on terrorism in general. Further and equally important, many Muslims live in countries that lack representative political participation and economic opportunity. These political and economic grievances against their own regimes are often translated into negative attitudes toward the United States because many of these "electoral autocracies" are supported by the United States. While the United States cannot and should not simply change its policies to suit public opinion abroad, we must use the tools of public diplomacy to assess the likely effectiveness of particular policies. Without such assessment, our policies could produce unintended consequences that do not serve our interests. Public diplomacy needs new and efficient feedback mechanisms that can be brought to bear when policy is made.

Separating simple opposition to policies from generalized anti-American attitudes is not easy. The two kinds of animosity interact and amplify through feedback loops. For example, a single word from the President of the United States (or from a congressman or even an American entertainer) can harden into formidable antagonism the view of an Arab citizen who was wavering on a policy question. Americans are often perplexed by such antagonism. Unlike powerful nations of the past, the United States does not seek to conquer but to spread universal ideals: liberty, democracy, human rights, equality for women and minorities, prosperity, and the rule of law. Specifically, according to our values and principles, the American vision for the Arab and Muslim world is for it to become a peaceful, prosperous region working toward participatory government, with democracy, social justice, human dignity, and individual freedom for all; a region where extremism, in either a secular or religious cloak, is marginalized and where the zone of tolerance is expanded.

In more concrete terms, stated American policy toward the Arab and Muslim world on issues like those below, needs to be more fully communicated:

- peaceful settlement of conflicts between the Arabs and Israelis, in Kashmir, and in the Western Sahara;
- peace and political and economic development in Afghanistan and Iraq;
- regional security cooperation;
- global energy security;
- free, open, representative, and tolerant political systems;
- economic growth through private market economies, free trade, and investment;
- education systems that prepare students to participate constructively in civil society and the global marketplace;
- a free press, with public and private media that educate, inform, and entertain, with careful attention to accuracy and respect for the diversity of the region;
- full participation of women and minorities in society.

Our values and our policies are not always in agreement, however. As mentioned above, the U.S. Government often supports regimes in the Arab and Muslim world that are inimical to our values but that, in the short term, may advance some of our policies. Indeed, many Arabs and Muslims believe that such support indicates that the U.S. is determined to deny them freedom and political representation. This belief often stems from our own ambivalence about the possibility that democracy's first beneficiaries in the Arab and Muslim world will be extremists. It has caught us in a deep contradiction - one from which public diplomacy, as well as official diplomacy, could extricate us. But we must take these key policy challenges in the region seriously, and we must minimize the gap between what we say (the high ideals we espouse) and what we do (the day today measures we take). We must underscore the common ground in both our values and policies.

But we have failed to listen and failed to persuade. We have not taken the time to understand our audience and its specific culture, and we have not bothered to help them understand us. We cannot afford such shortcomings. Surveys show that Arabs and Muslims admire the universal values for which the United States stands. They admire, as well, our technology, entrepreneurial zeal, and the achievements of Americans as individuals. Arabs and Muslims, it seems, support our values but believe that our policies do not live up to them. A major project for public diplomacy is to reconcile this contradiction through effective communications and intelligent listening.

Strategic Direction

First and foremost, public diplomacy requires a new strategic direction-informed by a seriousness and commitment that matches the gravity of our approach to national defense and traditional state-to-state diplomacy. This commitment must be led by the political will of the President and Congress and fueled by adequate financial and human resources.

The most effective programs of public diplomacy - the ones most likely to endure and have long-term impact - are those that are mutually beneficial to the United States and to the Arab and Muslim countries. We urge that care be taken to emphasize programs that build bridges and address the region's weaknesses, *especially in education*, while at the same time advancing the American message and building a constituency of friendship and trust. We also urge the U.S. Government to collaborate with American businesses and nonprofit organizations, which have the world's best talent and resources in communications and research. We emphasize that, in all public diplomacy efforts, the U.S. recognize that the best way to get our message across is often directly to the people - rather than through formal diplomatic channels.

Often, we are simply not present to explain the context and content of national policies and values. As the Advisory Group was told in Morocco: "If you do not define yourself in this part of the world, the extremists will define you." They have defined us, for example, as ruthless occupiers in Iraq and as bigots, intolerant to Muslims in our own country. These depictions are dead wrong, but they stick because it is rare that governments or individuals in the region are prepared to take up our side of the story and because the United States has deprived itself of the means to respond effectively - or even to be a significant part of the conversation.

What Transformation Will Require

The United States needs to transform the way we explain and advocate our values and policies and the way we listen to what others are saying about us - not just in Arab and Muslim states, but throughout the world. This transformation will require:

- A new clarity and strategic direction for public diplomacy, guided from the White House;
- a new process for developing strategic messages and disseminating them, making use of the best information technology;
- New programs to implement the strategy, continually test their effectiveness, and make adjustments;
- a top-to-bottom review of every current program, with the elimination or renovation of those that do not "move the needle," that is, produce more favorable attitudes toward the United States and more accurate understanding of American interests;
- a new management structure that provides accountability, speed, and coordination across many government departments, not just the State Department;
- adequate resources, drawn through reallocation from existing programs and through new personnel and money;
- a new balance between security and engagement, one that prevents U.S. embassies and other facilities from appearing to be "crusader castles," distant from the local population;
- and a firm commitment and directive from the President to all relevant government agencies that emphasizes the importance of public diplomacy in advancing American interests and tips the balance in favor of the forces of moderation.

The transformation we advocate can have a profound effect on Arab and Muslim societies as well. These societies are at a crossroads, with the opportunity to take the path toward greater liberty and prosperity, within the context of their own rich cultures. With effective policies and public diplomacy, we can galvanize indigenous moderates and reformers within these societies. The overall task is to marginalize the extremists.

Americans, on the one hand, and Arabs and Muslims, on the other, are trapped in a dangerously reinforcing cycle of animosity. Arabs and Muslims respond in anger to what they perceive as U.S. denigration of their societies and cultures, and to this Arab and Muslim response Americans react with bewilderment and resentment, provoking a further negative response from Arabs and Muslims. A transformed public diplomacy that is candid about differences but also stresses similarities – especially in values - can dampen the animosity and help end the cycle. Most changes will not occur overnight, but some steps, taken immediately, will produce short-term solutions. More importantly, however, the U.S. Government needs to view public diplomacy - just as it views state-to-state diplomacy and national security - in a long-term perspective. Transformed public diplomacy can make America safer, but it must be sustained for decades, not stopped and started as moods change in the world. Public opinion in the Arab and Muslim world cannot be cavalierly dismissed.

America can achieve dramatic results with a consistent, strategic, well-managed, and properly funded approach to public diplomacy, one that credibly reflects U.S. values, promotes the positive thrust of U.S. policies, and takes seriously the needs and aspirations of Arabs and Muslims for peace, prosperity, and social justice.

Financial Resources

Today, the State Department spends approximately \$600 million on public diplomacy programs worldwide, and the Broadcasting Board of Governors spends another \$540 million. In addition, the Middle East Partnership Initiative proposes to spend \$100 million to expand economic, political, and educational opportunity as well as to empower women.

These amounts together, by way of comparison, represent three-tenths of 1 percent of the annual Defense Department budget. Working with State Department budget officials, we calculate that only about \$150 million of the \$600 million public diplomacy budget was spent in Muslim-majority countries. But of that amount, the vast majority went to earmarked exchange programs and to the salaries of public affairs officers, foreign service nationals, and other employees involved in public diplomacy in embassies. Because of a lack of funds, very little public diplomacy work is carried on outside national capitals - a mistake, in our view, because the impact is often greater in such areas. We found that funding for public diplomacy outreach programs comes to only \$25 million for the entire Arab and Muslim world - a depressingly small amount. To say that financial resources are inadequate to the task is a gross understatement.

The importance of public diplomacy in meeting the strategic challenge that America faces in the Arab and Muslim world requires a dramatic increase in funding. The current level is absurdly and dangerously inadequate, and no amount of reprogramming of existing resources can correct this.

Human Resources

"In times of war and peace," wrote Secretary of State Powell in the May, 2003 issue of *State Magazine*, "our public diplomacy and public affairs efforts are crucial to the success of American foreign policy, and they must be integral to its conduct." He is correct, of course, but the State Department lacks the human resources for such crucial efforts. More than half the public affairs officers responding to the September 2003 GAO survey on public diplomacy said that the number of foreign service officers available for public diplomacy is insufficient. The State Department increased the number of officers in public diplomacy jobs from 414 to 448 in recent years, but that is still a paltry figure, with insufficient emphasis on the Arab and Muslim world. An effective public diplomacy campaign requires well-trained staff with an in-depth knowledge of the culture in target countries and fluency in local languages. Since 9/11, especially, it has become clear that training, Knowledge, and fluency are all sorely inadequate.

Additional professional staff for public diplomacy dedicated to issues of the Arab and Muslim world is urgently needed. The professional level of fluency in the local languages and the level

of knowledge about Arab and Muslim societies must be dramatically enhanced. *The Advisory Group's three main recommendations on human resources concern dedicated regional staff, language skills, and broader training.* We believe that professional staff for public diplomacy must be more dedicated to particular regions. Unlike other kinds of diplomatic work, where moving across regions is desirable for experience, the level of expertise required for public diplomacy, especially in the Arab and Muslim world, means that a core professional staff should be developed and targeted to specific areas. The ability to speak, write, and read a foreign language is one of the recognized prerequisites of effective communications. Foreign service officers who are fluent in Arabic immediately convey a sense of respect for and interest in the people to whom they speak, and fluency prevents the distortion of translation. Effective public diplomacy thus requires sufficient cadres of officers trained in the languages and dialects spoken in the Arab and Muslim world. Currently, however, far too few officers are able - and willing - to communicate publicly in the languages of the region - whether in Arabic and its many dialects, Turkish, Farsi, Urdu, Bahasa Indonesia, or others. The latest statistics show that only 54 State Department employees have tested at the fully professional or bilingual level of competence (at or above "Level 4") in Arabic. Of these, some were tested years ago and may no longer maintain the tested level of competence. Others are serving outside the Arab world.

Only a handful can hold their own on television. The situation with other languages common in the Muslim world is even worse. There are two problems. First, the absolute numbers trained to the requisite level is inadequate. Second, among officers with sufficient training, some shy away from public discourse; they protest they are not spokespersons and worry that mistakes in articulating and explaining policy may prove costly to their careers. It is imperative that the State Department recruit language-qualified personnel and train new and existing personnel in the relevant languages. A special effort should be made to recruit first-generation Arab-Americans and Muslim Americans. The time that must be invested in this training - typically two to three years - is best spent at the beginning of a career. Once an officer is properly trained, incentives must exist to encourage maintenance, improvement, and use of proficiency. Today, the State Department has 279 Arabic speakers at all levels, but only one-fifth have fluency. We recommend, as an initial goal, having 300 fluent speakers within two years and another 300 by 2008. Of these 600 fluent Arabic speakers, at least half should be willing and able to speak and debate publicly. In the meantime, as a stop-gap measure, the department should contract with competent consultants who already speak Arabic (and other languages of the region) to engage in public and media forums.

The State Department's Foreign Service Institute has embarked on a significant revamping of its Arabic training program. Departmental managers must parallel this by according greater recognition to the value of language training in assignments, compensation, awards, and promotions and by requiring those with the necessary fluency to participate actively in public diplomacy activities regardless of job title. The problem of inadequate language competency is widespread, not just in the U.S. Government but throughout American society. With a new strategic architecture, public diplomacy officials should address the issue broadly, but, for now, emergency measures are needed. Finally, as we note throughout the report, the training of those engaged in public diplomacy throughout the government - including AID officers and technology specialists - must be far broader and deeper.

Structure

The White House

One of the most important recommendations of the Advisory Group is the establishment of a Cabinet-level Special Counselor to the President for Public Diplomacy, who would head a relatively small office. The office would have limited line responsibilities.

Its function, in consultation with the President and other government agencies, would be to establish strategic goals and messages, to oversee the implementation of programs that meet those goals, and to ensure effective measurement of those programs. During the Cold War, the functions of this proposed Special Counselor were often performed by directors of USIA, such as Edward R. Murrow and Leonard Marks, who were both outstanding leaders and close confidants of the President. The Special Counselor would participate in policy formation within the NSC and would also chair a newly constituted President's Public Diplomacy Experts' Board, comprising 16 distinguished citizens outside the government with relevant expertise, plus, as ex-officio members, the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy. The board would continually assess the quality, quantity, and adequacy of public diplomacy programs and provide independent advice and analysis to the White House on long- and short-term issues concerning U.S. communications abroad.

The NSC

In addition, we urgently recommend that the interagency Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) be reactivated and co-chaired by the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs and by a high-level representative of the NSC. This reinvigorated NSC/PCC could help ensure effective operational coordination and increased synergies throughout all departments and agencies, with emphasis on bringing the efforts of the State Department, the Defense Department, the CIA, AID and others into concert.

The State Department

For public diplomacy to have a coherent strategy throughout the Arab and Muslim world, the role of the Under Secretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs must be strengthened in recognition of the incumbent's ultimate accountability for the effectiveness of the department's public diplomacy programs. We propose the enhancement of the Under Secretary's role in coordinating public diplomacy government-wide, but, within the department, the position needs enhancement as well and we have made specific recommendation in this respect, including the establishment of a "Public Communication Unit for the Arab and Muslim World."

The Under Secretary must set strategic guidance, review country program plans, allocate human and financial resources, monitor public opinion and program results, and play a role in performance evaluation - all in collaboration with missions abroad and in consultation with the geographic and functional bureaus.

AID, Defense and Other Agencies

The U.S. Agency for International Development and the Defense Department, both of which engage in activities with a significant public diplomacy dimension, as well as other national security agencies, must be more closely tied to the reinforced strategic direction and coordination that we propose.

Measurement of Programs

A new culture of measurement must be established within all public diplomacy structures.

The Broadcasting Board of Governors and Radio, TV and the Internet

With the exception of the news function, international broadcasting should be brought under the strategic oversight of the new Office of the Special Counselor to the President.

We recommended that a careful independent review of the merits of a U.S. sponsored Middle East Television Network initiative should be undertaken. The decision has been made to proceed with "Al Hurra". If it succeeds in attracting and influencing a significant audience, it will become a critical U.S. Government-sponsored voice in the Arab world. That would be an important accomplishment. Our interviews with people in the region, however, reveal a high level of skepticism about state-owned television of any sort. Whether "Al Hurra" will be effective is uncertain; a large investment will have to be made before serious testing of its ability to meet public diplomacy objectives can begin. An attractive, less costly alternative or supplement to "Al Hurra" may be the aggressive development of programming in partnership with private firms, nonprofit institutions, and government agencies - both in the United States and in Arab and Muslim nations. This programming can then be distributed through existing channels in the region. In this respect, the Advisory Group recommended that an independent Corporation for Public Diplomacy should be created to provide quality American content to existing regional TV channels and to facilitate funding for private and non-profit broadcasting and Internet applications. Like the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, this organization would make grants to individual producers and to independent, indigenous Media channels with the aim of creating and disseminating high quality programming in the Arab and Muslim world. This option should be kept under consideration.

The Advisory Group commended Radio Sawa for capturing a wide audience in parts of the Arab World through its creative mix of Arabic and American music programming. However, the view of the Advisory Group is that Sawa needs a clearer objective than building a large audience. To earn continued financial support, it should show, through continuous research, that it can change attitudes of Arab listeners toward the United States, that is, "move the needle" toward what the State Department, in its mission statement on public diplomacy and public affairs, calls "influence," which comprises "understanding," "constructive disagreement," and "active support."

Given the strategic importance of information technologies, a greater portion of the budget should be directed to tap the resources of the Internet and other communication technologies more effectively.

Education and Scholarship Programs

Given the drastic reduction in USAID scholarships awarded to students in the region, from 20,000 in 1980 to 900 currently, there should be a significant increase in funding for scholarships across the board.

Major increases in resources should be devoted to helping Arabs and Muslims gain access to American education, both in the U. S. and in Arab and Muslim countries. We urge creativity in linking U. S. educational institutions with their counterparts in the regions. A serious financial commitment, both private and public, should be made to educational institutions such as the American University of Beirut, the American University in Cairo, and others.

Since 9/11, many of the best students from the Muslim world have become discouraged from pursuing studies in the United States. U.S. officials should make current visa expectations and procedures clear, so students can make plans to study in the United States. Security needs must be balanced against the importance of changing attitudes toward the United States through exchanges.

The creation of American Studies programs in Arab and Muslim countries, through a collaborative effort with the private sector and with local universities, should be pursued.

Professional exchanges and educational programs of shorter duration that reach more diverse segments of the Arab and Muslim world should be expanded.

English Language Training

Programs in support of English language training, a critical instrument of outreach, education, and job opportunity, must be expanded and supported by increased funding and human resources.

American Corners

A rapid expansion of the scope of the American Corners program for local institutions should be undertaken, especially given the decreased access to American facilities because of security requirements.

American Knowledge Library

A major new initiative, the American Knowledge Library, should be launched. It involves translating thousands of the best American books in many fields of education into local languages and making them available to libraries, American Studies centers, universities, and American Corners.

U.S.-Muslim Centers

A permanent facility should be established for the study of Arab and Muslim societies and their relations with the United States and for enhancing intercultural and interfaith dialogue.

The United States should establish a center, along the lines of the Dante B. Fascell North-South Center at the University of Miami, which studies Western Hemisphere issues, and the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii, which promotes better relations between the U.S. and the countries of the Asia Pacific region. These centers are funded by the U.S. Government. No such center for the Arab and Muslim countries exists. The Center for U.S.-Arab/Muslim Studies and Dialogue, essentially a public-policy think tank, would study ways of strengthening understanding and relations between the United States and Arab and Muslim countries. Research would encompass many subjects, including trade, economic policy, immigration, democratic governance, corruption, security, the environment, and information technology. In addition to maintaining a research staff, the Center would direct an extensive program of international fellowships for decision-makers from Arab and Muslim countries. The center should be located at a university in a major cosmopolitan urban area, most preferably New York.

Conclusion

The solutions that the Advisory Group advocates match these times, when we are engaged in a major, long-term struggle against the forces of extremism, whether secular or religious. We call for a dramatic transformation in public diplomacy - in the way the United States communicates its values and policies to enhance our national security. That transformation requires structural reorganization and an immediate end to the absurd and dangerous under funding of public diplomacy in a time of peril, when our adversaries have succeeded in spreading viciously inaccurate claims about our intentions and our actions. Their success in the struggle of ideas is all the more stunning because American values are so widely shared. As one of our Iranian interlocutors put it, "Who has anything against life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness?" We cannot let the extremists define us. We must define ourselves. The challenge is clear. Our commitment to wage this struggle for ideas should be equally clear.